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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S JULY 7 MEETING WITH PAPAL NUNCIO

REF: A. BAGHDAD 2060
 1B. BAGHDAD 2096

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Classified By: By Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

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SUMMARY

11. (C) Archbishop Chullikatt, papal nuncio to Iraq, acknowledged that the Iraqi Christian community faced many challenges, but believes that these could be overcome with the right kind of support and assistance. According to Chullikatt, Iraqi Christians' number one concern is security, followed by better public services, and the just resolution of property rights and legal issues. Agreeing with the Ambassador that well-intentioned parties outside of Iraq were trying to impose solutions on Iraq's minorities, Chullikatt stressed that neither Iraqi bishops nor the Holy See support a Christian autonomous zone or special Christian security forces. Chullikatt also called for additional humanitarian aid for Iraqi minority refugees, including Christians, in neighboring countries, so that they would have an incentive to stay near Iraq. Chullikatt accepted Post's offer to facilitate joint visits to Christian sites in Baghdad and elsewhere in Iraq (ref A) and noted that two senior Vatican officials were thinking of visiting Iraq. Regarding the notion of a conference on Iraqi minorities, Chullikatt insisted it needed to be held within Iraq itself were it to have credibility and not alienate Iraqi leadership. He agreed with the Ambassador that a more pro-active approach to supporting minorities is needed on the part of the GOI and KRG and promised to provide us with additional information on specific minority problems and needs so that Post could use it in proposing corrective action to GOI and KRG leadership.

END SUMMARY.

DISCREET ASSISTANCE FOR VISITS WELCOME

12. (C) In a July 7 meeting with the Ambassador, Deputy PolCounselor, and Poloff (notetaker), Papal Nuncio Archbishop Francis Assisi Chullikat accepted the Embassy's offer of logistical assistance to visit Christian religious sites in Baghdad and elsewhere in Iraq, noting that it would be very useful to see and report back to the Vatican what is going on on the ground. Chullikatt added that Cardinal Leonardo Sandri, who heads the Congregation for Oriental Churches, was considering a visit to Iraq, as was Cardinal Renato Martino, President of the Pontifical Council on Justice and Peace and former Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations in New York. Chullikatt said he encouraged high-ranking Vatican officials to visit Iraq, pointing out the experience would better help them handle media inquiries about the situation of Christians in Iraq. He agreed with

the Ambassador that such visits were a natural follow-on to PM Maliki's recent public pledges to support minorities. Chullikatt did not believe the Vatican would object to our logistical and security assistance for such visits, as long as it was very discreet.

PRODDING THE GOI AND KRG TO ACTION

¶3. (C) Chullikatt acknowledged that it would be helpful for the Non-Muslim Endowment's Office to get funds in order to undertake Church restoration projects (ref B) and was gratified by the Ambassador's news that we were directly engaging the Finance Ministry and the Prime Minister's Office. He noted that the governments of Sweden and Germany had also provided financial assistance for minorities, none of which had actually reached those populations, he claimed. He promised to provide us with details of these cases. Chullikatt said KRG Minister of Finance Sarkis Aghajan had explained KRG actions on behalf of Christians in the north in the way of security and housing. According to Chullikatt, bishops in the north were generally satisfied with KRG assistance, although requests for schools and clinics in more remote areas of Dohuk had been turned down by Minister Sarkis, who cited limited resources. Chullikatt said that Christians whose properties had been confiscated in the past still expected compensation from the KRG, but when they raise the issue to officials, are told that there are more pressing problems. Chullikatt promised to find out how many families are claiming compensation, with details of their claims, so that this could be presented to the KRG, who may be trying to downplay the problem. He commented that agreement on the principle of compensation could encourage Christian returnees to the region. Resolving the exact mechanics of compensation could be left for a later date. The more pressing concern

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for these displaced Christians was that they often had no home to which to return in the interim.

SECURITY HEADS LIST OF PRIORITIES

¶4. (C) Chullikatt confirmed that while security for minorities, including Christians, is the top priority, there was no need for special Christian security forces to protect churches or Christian neighborhoods. The mere presence of regular police in an area would serve as an effective deterrent to harassment or criminal activity against them and their property. Chullikatt advocated diversification of police patrols, noting that there was a security force presence surrounding mosques, but not around churches. Chullikatt said that when he had first arrived in Baghdad, the Apostolic Nunciature had no GOI-provided security; he spoke with the Ministry of the Interior, which then provided police protection. Chullikatt will provide us with a list of areas in which he believes the GOI security presence is inadequate.

IRAQI ISSUES SHOULD BE DISCUSSED IN IRAQ

¶5. (C) While Chullikatt agreed that a minorities conference could be helpful in focusing attention on the needs of Iraq's minorities, it would be inadvisable to hold such a conference in Washington, D.C. or elsewhere outside of Iraq. In his view, the immediate reaction would be that the U.S. was setting the agenda, and deciding the policies to be applied to Iraqis. He further warned that any such conference held outside Iraq would risk becoming captive to diaspora figures whose views were not representative of Christians in Iraq and whose understanding of the situations was dated and skewed. Moreover, to be constructive, the Conference would require active participation by Iraqis on a national level. The Nuncio added that he has consistently argued against holding church conferences or gatherings of Iraqi bishops in

neighboring countries.

¶16. (C) Chullikatt noted that he is currently working on ensuring that certain types of legal cases, such as divorce, involving Christians are not referred to Sharia courts. Jordan, where the Chullikatt is also accredited as Nuncio, was a model in this regard, he said. He said Christian leaders, both Catholic and Orthodox, were meeting in Baghdad on a bimonthly basis for discussion of the matter. He also suggested that the right to religious instruction in Iraqi schools with Christian students was a live issue. The previous GoI practice had been to authorize limited instruction in schools where Christians make up more than 20 percent of students.

NO PRECISE POPULATION NUMBERS AVAILABLE

¶17. (C) Chullikatt said that reliable figures for the number of Christians in Iraq, and their distribution among the various sects, are simply not available. He noted that according to his estimation, 70 percent of Iraqi Christians are Chaldean, whereas if one asked Chaldean Patriarch Cardinal Delly, his answer would be 80 percent. Chullikatt believes that half of Iraq's Christians are outside of Iraq. This has resulted in the closure of many parishes, which work directly with the people and have direct knowledge of their needs.

AUTONOMOUS ZONE NOT THE SOLUTION, KEEP IRAQIS NEARBY

¶18. (C) Chullikatt stressed that the Holy See and the Bishops in Iraq do not support the creation of a Christian autonomous zone in the Nineva plain. Not only is the Nineva plain not 100 percent Christian, the very idea contradicts the notion of a new Iraq where all citizens are equal. He termed the autonomous zone plan a well-intentioned, but unrealistic and inadvisable, proposal from outside of Iraq, including by voices in the Chaldean diaspora who did not possess an accurate picture of the situation in Iraq.

¶19. (C) With regard to Christian refugees, Chullikatt said the Church had appealed to a number of governments (including those of Sweden, Germany, and France) for additional humanitarian assistance for the minority refugees in Syria, Jordan and Lebanon. The aim is to ameliorate the conditions of refugees nearby, for instance by facilitating the right of their children to schooling, and thus deter them from continuing their migration and requesting asylum in western countries, which in the long term would be far more

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burdensome to the international community. The hope is that refugees who remain in the immediate proximity of Iraq would be more likely to eventually return to their homes in Iraq.

CROCKER